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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the application of self-efficacy beliefs on career development. This theory was introduced by Hackett and Betz (1981) and has received many extensive studies. There are many factors that may influence career self-efficacy such as gender, culture, parental, and family backgrounds. The methods of increasing career self-efficacy are also discussed. (Contains 34 references.) (Author)

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Career Development and Self-Efficacy Belief

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Abstract

This article discusses the application of self-efficacy beliefs on career development. This theory was introduced by Hackett and Betz (1981) and has received many extensive studies. There are many factors that may influence career self-efficacy such as gender, culture, parental, and family backgrounds. The methods of increasing career self-efficacy are also discussed.

Self-Efficacy Belief and Career Development

A career is an essential part of life and it influences many aspects of life. Therefore, planning and choosing a career is among the important decisions that have to be made. Super (1957) believes that choosing a career is a lifelong process that extends from childhood to adulthood. A career also plays an important role in the development of one's self-concept. According to Super, there are many factors that may influence someone to choose a career such as parental and socio-cultural backgrounds, and the job characteristics. Super's Life Span Theory views vocational maturity as an important determinant in career choice.

Holland (1973) considers that the congruency between the personality and the work environment is an important aspect that allows people to function and develop successfully, and find job satisfaction in their careers. He classifies personalities into six types; realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. Holland's work has been widely used and has been translated into many languages. Although his theory appears to be applicable to people from various backgrounds, there is some question of gender bias in that most females tend to be predominantly in three personality types; artistic, social and conventional (Johnson, 2002). Besides the congruency between the personality and the work environment, results from various studies (Hackett, 1985; Betz & Schifano, 2002; Luzzo, 1993) have shown that self-efficacy belief plays an important role in the career decision making.

Self-efficacy

According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy refers to people's perception of their abilities to perform certain tasks successfully. This belief influences how people think, feel, and motivate themselves (Bandura, 1995). Bandura (1995) postulates that there are four main sources of self-efficacy. The first source is mastery experience. Bandura believes that mastery experience plays an important role in developing self-efficacy. Outcomes interpreted as successful will raise human efficacy. In contrast, any failure experience will lower the level of self-efficacy, especially before it is firmly established. Both the success and the failure experiences help a person to have a resilient sense of efficacy.

The second source of self-efficacy is the vicarious experience that is provided by observing and modeling others. The influence of modeling depends on the perceived similarity to the models. By observing others' successes and failures, people are able to judge their own capabilities.

Social persuasion is the third source of self-efficacy belief. Others persuasion convinces people to believe that they have certain skills. However, Bandura (1995) reminds his readers that this persuasion also can undermine peoples' self-efficacy when used to convince them that they lack capabilities. As a result, they may avoid any challenging activities and give up when facing difficulties.

People also rely on the physiological and emotional states such as stress and tension (Bandura, 1995) or aches and pains (Ewart, 1992) when making judgments of their capabilities. Their bodily states may drive them to think that they are not able to

perform certain tasks. In order to alter that belief, people must enhance the physical and emotional states that help them to judge their capabilities positively.

Self-efficacy and career development

The applicability of Self-efficacy Theory to career development was first suggested by Betz & Hackett (1981). In their study, they found that self-efficacy had an influence on women's career decision making. They also found that self-efficacy can be utilized for understanding and treatment of career development problems (Betz, 2000). Since 1981, career self-efficacy has received extensive study and researchers have demonstrated that it plays an important role in career development.

The proponents of this theory stress the interaction of personal attributes, external environmental factors and behavior in career decision-making (Kerka, 1998). If people believe that they have the abilities to perform certain tasks and have expectations of the outcomes, they will try their best to achieve their goals. Low self-efficacy regarding such behaviors will lead people to avoid those behaviors and they will tend to give up when faced with failure experiences. In the context of career development, approach and avoidance behaviors can be related to career choice and career decision-making (Betz, 2000).

Gender and Career Self-efficacy

Research suggests that gender plays an important role in career self-efficacy. . It means that the level of self-efficacy of women in traditional male occupations is lower than in traditional female occupations.

. The results also show that the level of mathematics self-efficacy belief of female students is lower than that of male students. The low level of mathematical self-efficacy belief has led women to avoid science-based carriers.

The results also show that success expectations for nontraditional occupations distinguished between two groups, but not as much as did self-efficacy for traditional occupations. In general, the findings of this study support the role of self-efficacy in career choice.

The findings of Matsui's study (1994) show that sex did not contribute to the prediction of male's self-efficacy. They reported equivalent self-efficacy for the two types of occupations. However, consistent with the previous findings (Betz & Hackett, 1981; Betz &Hackett, 1983), females reported significantly higher levels of self-efficacy than males for female-dominated occupations, but significantly lower levels of self-efficacy than males for male-dominated occupations.

The findings of the studies show that gender has an impact on career self-efficacy. Gysbers, Heppner & Johnston (1998) believe that the narrowing of career and occupational choices of girls may be influenced by role models and the sex-role socialization of boys and girls. The people we interact with, the ways people behave, and our perception towards those factors contribute to the development of career self-efficacy. Math avoidance, lower self-efficacy belief about nontraditional careers, relational focus, and role conflict has led women to choose traditional female occupations (Gysbers, et al., 1998). This gender-stereotyped choice starts as early as two years old (Gettys & Cann, 1996).

Cultural Background and Career Self-efficacy

The relationship between culture and career self-efficacy has also been studied by researchers. The term culture refers to the set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterize the group (Longman Dictionary, 2000). A wide-spread conception about Western people is that they are likely to have high decision-making self-efficacy. Previous studies (Huang, 1971; Pajares & Miller, 1994) showed that American students have a higher decision making self-efficacy when compared to Asian students. Tang, Fouad, and Smith (1999) investigated the factors that might influence Asian American's career choices. The findings of the study show that the impact of self-efficacy on career choice to be positive. The attitude of Asian American parents who tend to encourage their youngsters to pursue occupations that are financially secure and rewarding help the children to have high levels of self-efficacy in technically-related occupations.

A study conducted by Cheng Mau (2000) also shows consistent findings. The Taiwanese students scored significantly lower on the career decision-making measure than did American students. The researcher believes that the collective-oriented culture may have influenced Taiwanese students to depend less on the individual abilities than on group efforts.

Sexual orientation is another cultural factor that may influences the career self-efficacy. Morrow, Gore, and Campbell (1996) applied the Social Cognitive Theory (Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) to the career development of lesbian women and gay men. In their view, gender identity, traditional, and nontraditional role orientations are primary influences on career development in the early childhood of lesbian women and

gay men. Being labeled as "different" may lead them to restrict or enhance the opportunities to develop career self-efficacy.

Parental and Family Influences and Career Self-efficacy

The role of parent and the role of counselors go hand in hand in the career development of adolescents. It has been hypothesized that parental role and support have a significant and positive impact on career development process (Turner & Lapan, 2002). Results from the study conducted by Ferry, Fouad, and Smith (2000) indicate the impact that parents have on their children's career self-efficacy. According to their study, parents can enhance their children's self-efficacy by verbal persuasion. The results of the study by Turner and Lapan are in line with Ferry, et al. (2000). Career self-efficacy, career planning and perceived parent support interactively predicted young adolescent career interest for all Holland type careers.

The results of Hargrove, Creagh and Burgess (2001) research support the finding of the previous studies. Even a small amount of family support plays a significant role in college students' confidence in engaging in developmentally appropriate career planning activities and the ability to formulate clear and stable goals.

According to Herr (1998), the factors and the influences which shape career development begin in the family context, probably before child begins school. The more family members encourage and provide the opportunities for the child to be involved in competitive and achievement-oriented activities, the higher the tendency to have clear vocational interests and career goals (Hargrove, Creagh, and Burgess, 2002).

Methods to Increase Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy belief plays an important role in occupational development. The career choice people make shapes the course of their lives (Bandura, 1995). Researches show that there are several methods to increase career self-efficacy. The use of DISCOVER, the America College Testing computer-assisted guidance program in career guidance has been proposed by researchers. DISCOVER was designed to help students develop a personal profile, build a career plan based on their personal profile, access information about occupations and education, and begin job searches and interview preparations. A self-assessment section helps people discover vocational identity and improve the level of career awareness. It may also improve career self-efficacy (Wonacutt, 2001).

Fukuyama (1988), in his study examined the impact of DICOVER on career self-efficacy and career decision making among 177 college undergraduates. Results revealed that using DISCOVER had positive effects on both career self-efficacy and career decision making among these undecided college students.

Betz and Schifano (2000) used intervention based on Self-efficacy Theory recommended by Betz (1992) to increase confidence and interest in Realistic activities of 54 college women. The intervention focused on building, repairing, and construction activities. The four sources of self-efficacy were also included. Results indicate that the self-efficacy expectations of college women with respect to the Realistic domain of Holland theory could be significantly increased with the intervention.

Sullivan and Mahalik (2002) also used the same intervention to look at whether it may increase career self-efficacy of women. The group intervention was found to be

effective in increasing the career self-efficacy and vocational exploration of the participating women.

The model developed by William (2000) may also be used to increase career self-efficacy. The model consists of four themes to help women shape a career path. The purpose of his model is to develop inner resilience, career enhancement, quality of life, and the capstone strengths that enable women to position themselves self for future success. William believes that career professional can help women making wise career choice by using his model.

Conclusion

The influence of self-efficacy on career choice and the career decision-making process has received extensive study by many researchers. Betz and Hackett (1981) were the first two researchers to study the impact of self-efficacy beliefs on career development. The question of why women continue to be under represented in traditionally male occupations may be answered by understanding women's career self-efficacy. Researches also show that there are many factors that influence career self-efficacy such as gender, culture, parental, and family backgrounds. Efforts should be done to improve the career self-efficacy due to its importance in career development. There are some strategies that have been used and found to be effective to increase the level of self-efficacy such as group intervention and using the computer-assisted guidance programs such as DISCOVER.

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